(167)
(R)

SECRET

November 14, 1949

EXPLORATORY DISCUSSIONS

In his introductory remarks, Mr. George McGhee said that such intimate discussions had now become a normal aspect of Anglo-American relations. It was clearly understood by both parties that the conclusions from the talks constituted no binding agreements on the parties concerned and that the purpose of the exchanges of view was to find areas of agreement. In the case of the United States Group the opinions expressed and conclusions reached were tentative until the conclusion of the conference of American representatives in the Near East which was opening in Istanbul on November 26th. (Following the conclusion of this meeting it would be necessary to spell out the discussions and obtain higher approval for more precise definition of policies.)

Mr. Wright confirmed Mr. McGhee's view of the status of the talks and pointed out that conclusions reached on the British side would also be for approval by higher authority. He hoped that the talks would lead to agreement on the same set of principles for tackling problems in the Middle East.

Mr. McGhee said he had considered carefully Anglo-American relations in the Near East and had come to the conclusion that the objectives of the two countries in the area were identical, although there might be a difference of method in seeking to attain them. Both countries attached high importance to the area from a security point of view. American interests were parallel and not competitive and both countries shared a common desire for the stability of the area and its orientation towards the West. The differences in methods might arise from the fact that the influence and material interests of the United Kingdom and the United States were not the same in each country. Points of asymmetry, therefore, were only superimposed on an area of broad agreement. He emphasized that the United States Government had no desire to compete with or to hinder the United Kingdom in carrying out its policy in the Middle East. The United States policy was, however, governed by the limitations imposed by the nature of the United States Government, its policy of non-interference, and the difficulty of securing ~~ad hoc~~ treatment.

Mr. Wright

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

SECRET

REVIEWED BY WOLFE JR. DATE 6/1/82

RDS or XDS EXT. DATE
TS AUTH. REASON(S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐
DECLASSIFIED ☒ RELEASABLE ☒
RELEASE DENIED
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

Mr. Wright agreed in general with the above analysis. He said that in the United Kingdom view the Middle East was a key to the struggle with the Soviet Union. If Western influence was removed from the Middle East, either voluntarily or by force, Communism would certainly fill the vacuum left. The Middle East under Communist control would bring alarming results. It would affect the whole United Kingdom relationship with Asia. It would prejudice the future of Europe and would pave the way for Communist domination in Africa. The triumph of Soviet ideology in the Middle East and Africa would secure a tremendous strategic prize for the U.S.S.R., the possession of which would in other circumstances cost her a great expenditure of blood and treasure. With this prize, the U.S.S.R. might be emboldened to take further aggressive action. The loss of the Middle East to Communism would have a devastating economic effect on the United Kingdom. Post-war recovery would be prejudiced and, deprived of Middle East oil and to a lesser extent, cotton, the United Kingdom economy would be irretrievably damaged. It was to our common advantage that the United States Government should increasingly concern itself with the Middle East. The United Kingdom Government had no desire to persuade the United States Government in this matter. It was entirely a decision for the United States Government but he wished to make it clear that the presence of the United States in the Middle East was considered by the United Kingdom to be to the common advantage.

Mr. McGhee replied that the importance of the Middle East to the United States Government was determined to a considerable extent by its importance to the United Kingdom Government. The Americans had no comparable position in Africa and Asia to protect and, in the matter of oil, was not so dependent as the United Kingdom on Middle East supplies. Nevertheless, American oil interests were large and the area was important from the point of view of strategic position and air communications. For the United States to take an increased interest in the Middle East was the assumption of a new responsibility. In these discussions the pervading problem from the American side was how far to go in accepting new responsibilities and in taking a more positive role in the area. It was not sufficient just to ward off Communism in the Middle East, it was essential to assist the peoples of the Middle East to improve their living standards and social and political institutions and to acquire self respect and their proper place among the nations of the world. The United States Government had found

found it advantageous to back nationalism against communism. But nationalism was not necessarily friendly to British and American interests. We should aim at putting the Middle East countries on their own feet and persuading them voluntarily to turn toward the West. The United States was in the process of deciding how far it should and could go in a positive approach to the area to achieve the foregoing objectives.

Mr. Wright agreed that support of nationalism could be used effectively against the spread of communism. But nationalism and communism could not be fought together. It should be our objective to convert the nationalism of the Middle East countries into a friendly force. France, Belgium and Holland did not yet wholly share this view. The preoccupation of the youthful countries of the Middle East with political problems made it very difficult for economic progress to be made. It was, however, the view of the United Kingdom that the effect of the Palestine problem was fading and the moment for more constructive action by the United Kingdom and the United States was approaching.

The conclusions drawn from the above discussion are as follows:-

(a) The general objectives of the United States and United Kingdom Governments in the Middle East are basically the same.

(b) The maintenance and extension of a friendly attitude on the part of the Middle Eastern countries to the United Kingdom and United States influence is a vital factor in the security of the Western Powers. The denial of the area to Communist influence, in peace no less than in war, is essential.

(c) The United States has no desire to compete with or hinder the United Kingdom Government in its activities in the Middle East area but on the contrary both have a desire to reinforce the general position of the other.

(d) Should the United States Government choose to assume a greater responsibility in the area, such a decision would be welcomed by the United Kingdom as being to the common advantage.

(e) It

(e) It must be our common aim to align the forces of nationalism in the Middle East against communism and to guide them into channels friendly to the Western Powers.

(f) With the bitterness of the Palestine problem receding the moment for United States and United Kingdom to take more constructive action to achieve common objectives is at hand. The United States Government is at present considering how far it can go in making a more positive approach to the area.

Approved by Mr. Matthes and Mr. Wright
November 20, 1949